Consciousness, Perspective, Community

Abstract

This paper seeks to draw some contrasts between objects and conscious beings in order to provide an explanation of the emergence of consciousness. This contrast will show a source of differences between objects and conscious beings to arise from the interpretation of scenes in which each feature: the characterisation of scenes in which conscious agents are present exhibits *interpretive complexities* not seen in those comprised solely of objects. Interpretation itself will then be shown to be reliant upon the communicative potentials of a community. The difference consciousness makes will hereby be shown to be grounded in interpretations that rely upon communication communities, or more generally, in an account of points of view. The emergence of consciousness will thus be explained in terms of interpretation and community.

Being Conscious

If we ask, “What does a conscious being do?” we could expect answers like: thinks, feels, acts; Obeys the law; Observes cultural norms; socialises. These are all true and expected. Unexpected but true answers might include... well, what, exactly? Here is a difference in possible descriptions about objects versus conscious beings. An essential part of being conscious is having a constitutive role in the actions one enacts. To restate it: someone may try to catch a ball, but fall in a lake instead. Their report that they were trying to catch the ball cannot be ruled out as irrelevant by a third person's statement otherwise.

Maintaining that 'falling in the lake' is *the* relevant action from a third-personal point of view does not do the same work in the face of the self-report as does such a report of an object. The 'trying to catch the ball' is inherently relevant to the falling in the lake. The experience of ‘a missed catch’ cannot be captured by any but a few physical descriptions of the scene. A third party's interest in lake-falling doesn't make the catch-effort irrelevant to the context. This is in contrast with discussing physical systems where such bracketing is often appropriate: if we are interested in the velocity of a projectile, its colour, smell, launch date etc. are ignored. Or again, for example, with a computational system, it is irrelevant whether the computer is realised in silicon, arrangements of valves, tin cans and string or any other material when we are simply interested in its output of, say, a correctly deduced conclusion from given premises.

At the extreme, when considering scenes in which conscious beings are present, fixation with lake-falling to the exclusion of catch-efforts misses something essential to the context. The intended action is bound up with the possibility of affording the error that is falling in the lake, as it is part of the articulable – the communicable – features of the scene.

Before moving on to explore this problematic, it is worth summarising now the argument to follow in order to link this brief outline to the resources to be deployed subsequently. The general argument goes as follows:

1.) There is at least one significant difference in general between scenes that include conscious agents as opposed to those that do not.

2.) The role of perspective is a significant difference.

3.) Accounting for perspective relies upon an account of reasons.

4.) Reasons are discerned *via* acts of interpretation.

5.) Interpretations are linked closely with linguistic communication, as this is the storehouse *par excellence* for reasons.

The idea is that this difference, one related to the role of perspective, accounts for the emergence of consciousness. What can be said about perspective is therefore held to say something about the emergence of consciousness, in this case that it is closely tied to *reasons* and their *interpretation* in action, especially *communicative action*.[1]

Cognition and Computation

According to Bruner (1990), a revolution that occurred within psychology has made it increasingly difficult to discuss consciousness without resort to a computational model. This model posits the mind as an *information processor* and designates its proper study as such. The emphasis upon information processing as opposed to meaning construction is, for Bruner, an unfortunate one that serves to obscure more than it reveals about consciousness. Agency is one particular area that was rendered problematic by this shift:

"Cognitive scientists, in the main, have no quarrel with the idea that behaviour is directed, even directed toward goals. If direction is governed by the results of computing the utility of alternative outcomes, this is perfectly bearable and, indeed, is the centrepiece of 'rational choice theory'. But cognitive science in its new [computational] mood, despite all its hospitality toward goal-directed behavior, is still chary of a concept of agency. For 'agency' implies conduct under the sway of intentional states." (Bruner 1990:9)

In order to understand the computational position here being challenged, it is important to see what computational systems might be. Following Fodor, as discussed by Taylor (1983:148), we can see a system as computational if:

1.) we can map physical states of that system onto the formulae of a reductive language

2.) we can relate prior states of the system (causally, functionally or otherwise) to subsequent states using the rules of that reductive language to model the states

We can then describe, report, predict – capture the purportedly computational nature of the system – thanks to the language and the model.

[1] Throughout this piece, 'action' is taken as behaviour based in reasoning, as opposed to reaction which may be simply caused. Communicative action is the apogee of such action as it is both a product of reasoned action

In the case of understanding how objects relate to one another in various scenes this strategy is generalisable: we can represent objects to ourselves in different ways according to what features strike us as salient. We can then model the relations between these states according to adequate descriptions (i.e. map states to a reductive language.) Thus we can theorise about the world around us, predict, report and so on about its antics. For instance, where we discuss physical systems we can use various reductions to the language of physics, such as frictionless planes, point masses, wave superpositions and so on. We can then make a theory of the scene at hand and understand it as *a physical system*.

This approach loses plausibility when it comes to scenes that include conscious beings (cf. Taylor Loc. Cit.) By way of illustration, it seems important that the 'trying' in a person's trying to pass their driving test, but crashing into a lamp-post, is constitutive of the scene in a non-trivial way. It is significantly different to a scenario in which an empty car's brakes fail and it simply rolls into a lamp-post. A conscious being's *own accounts of what they are doing* seem non-trivially to constitute at least some aspects of the scenes in which those beings are present. It is unclear how an information-processing reduction can account for this. It is unclear as the information in a scene involving conscious beings includes meaningfulness from a point of view, or intentional content. From these sorts of considerations come Bruner's concern above about the removal of agency on a computational model.

At least two issues come from this that will bear further scrutiny. Firstly, it seems that discussions of objects can be carried out relatively unproblematically from a third-personal point of view, and according to prior interests. Secondly, where conscious beings are present, it seems that first-person-constructed meaning in part *determines* the scene.

On the one hand, the argument suggests that there is nothing intrinsic to a system that determines its meaningfulness. On the other, self-consciousness appears to be an intrinsically relevant feature of systems *qua* scenarios in which conscious beings are present. This seems at least in tension, at worst a contradiction. The material world of inanimate objects behaves in certain ways owing to deterministic laws of nature to which we can reduce our descriptions, but human beings can act in ways not readily captured by any particular reduction. This perhaps nods at least to a Kantian notion of freedom wherein human beings can act according to laws other than these 'merely' causal ways (Kant 1898:117). This also introduces, however, a note of mysterianism, or the idea that consciousness introduces something 'other' to a scene that could otherwise be understood simply.

A way through these issues comes via the notion of interpretation. Having first discussed Putnam (1981) and his 'brains in vats', the argument will go that if we rely upon the idea of interpretation, both the contingency of objective descriptions and the seemingly essential role of consciousness to a scene will be clarified. The upshot will be that we are given some basis for the view that perspective is important where conscious beings are present, and that interpretation is always relative to a perspective. Following from this, the argument will go on to see how reasons and reasoning feature in understanding or accounting for this perspectivally-rich picture.

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and a means of overtly presenting the reasoning. The presentation of the basis for these views is out of scope. See for instance Brandom (1998) or Habermas (2004)

'Internal Realism'

Putnam (1981) scrutinises the nature of reference – the nature of how we might pick out objects in the world – in the light of representation. A common view of how objects in the world have meaning for us is that we represent them in our minds, perhaps as a picture or proposition of some kind. Having discussed five scenarios wherein the role of representations regarding reference is problematised (1981:1ff), Putnam goes on to set up and then discount the Cartesian demon-esque, sceptical conceit of the 'brain in the vat'.

According to this thought experiment, a population has its entire reality fed directly into its nervous systems *via* a supercomputer. Thus, what for us would be reality merely *seems to be so* for those in the vats, their entire reality being merely an interactive computer-generated image. Putnam seeks to undermine the possibility of this scenario by showing it to be self-refuting. We are asked to consider what is going on when a vat-dweller utters, 'there is a tree in front of me'. The statement may well be true for the utterer, but so in vat-English. What is referred to in the vat-language is a *tree-in-the-image*, even though they don't know it is an image. In fact, supposing the vat-dweller to have been in the image since birth, they could not refer to real, actual trees as could someone from the real world. They could never have been in any relation whatsoever to such things. They have only ever been in any kind of relation to *things-in-the-image*.

Next, we are supposed to consider whether we could really be brains in vats, or rather, what is going on when a vat-dweller says, 'I am a brain in a vat'. Since the 'brains' and the 'vats' to which utterers so placed can refer are brains and vats *in the image*, and since the image presents itself as a reality, the utterer of such a statement *can only mean* that they are brains in vats *in the image*. Owing to the nature of the image, this is not the case; those in the image are presented with a world qualitatively identical with ours. Thus, if we are brains in vats (actual, real brains in actual, real vats) subject to the illusion that we are normal human beings going about our normal lives as given by the image, then the statement 'we are brains in vats' is false. Thus, the statement 'we are brains in vats' can only be false. The brain in the vat hypothesis is '...in a certain way, self-refuting.' (1981:7)

This refutation of the sceptical hypothesis challenges views of reference regarding the role of resemblance and intentionality; what's 'in the head' can't determine once and for all the meaningfulness of any given scene. Elsewhere, Putnam (1992:18) describes this kind of position in terms of there being no 'God's Eye View', a view from which a final description of the world could emanate. The interpretation of a scene, bounded by theoretical (linguistic) possibility, is an essential part of making sense of that scene.

The relevance of this discussion to the present argument is in terms of the limits imposed by language upon the possibilities of reference that Putnam establishes – there is no general reductive language into which talk about the world may be transformed: 'tree' versus 'tree-in-the-image' is a significant difference, but one not universally discernible owing to the practical relations in which speakers and the spoken about must be. In Putnam's words, 'Thought words and mental pictures do not intrinsically represent what they are about.' (1981:5)

An account such as Putnam's can be seen as underlying the notion that suggests self-consciousness is constitutive of a system wherein a conscious being is present – In an agent's perception of any object as having some quality, it is always already implied that the recognition of the possibilities for

recognising and utilising that quality are somehow associated with that object. One might, for instance, see a ball as 'catchable'. But a ball's catchability will vary across dimensions such as physical ability, confidence, the rules of a game that might be being played (e.g. the ball is physically catchable, but this is football and I'm not in goal, so really I cannot catch it). My trying to catch a ball and my possible failure will cluster around a great many factors, each of which the product of intra- and inter- personally evaluable judgement. This presents us with a seemingly necessary role for:

a.) points of view

and

b.) prior theory in understanding descriptions of a scene

Just as the vat-dweller can't speak of trees apart from in the image, nor can any agent speak for themselves outside of a particularly structured perspective. The ways in which I may see the ball as catchable are structured by factors to do with my perspective. To put in generally, to see any object as having some quality, to see *x as Q*, is to judge it so. Such a perception is equal to a judgement – when we represent *x* to ourselves as *Q-able* this is at least in part because we judge that *x* under suitable descriptions can be *Qd*.[2]

However it should be apparent that such judgements cannot be readily subsumed under an information processing rubric. There is no 'God's Eye View' from which theory-free information can be discerned and then layered with postulates. In other words when we judge that 'x under suitable descriptions can be Qd', the '...under suitable descriptions' part is up for grabs.

When conscious beings are involved, interpretation is too. Against mysterianism, however, Putnam's arguments also make clear that nothing 'in the head' is doing strange work in rendering the scene what it is. In fact, Putnam's position seems to orient the locus of consciousness from 'inside the head' to linguistic activity in the external world – without a 'God's Eye View' we must rely on our own sub-lunar abilities.

Consonant with Putnam's account of the role of language in setting limits on the possibility of reference, Davidson (2001) argues further that it is only once a group can communicate that any sense can be made of points of view at all. From this it can be argued that communication underwrites the evaluation of one description over another. This in turn suggests that before one can begin considering objects, consciousness, oneself, another or agency, oneself and the other at least are always already presupposed. Self conscious perspective, in other words, requires an account of community.

The judgement that 'the system computes,' or 'the driver crashed,' 'the ball was well caught' or that 'x can be Qd,' runs on the basis that such a judgement may be communicated to another. Consciousness, it emerges, requires an account of self-conscious perspective that is itself reliant upon the communicative potentials of a community. This will require considerable unpacking as a lot has come out in quick succession. In order to set about this unpacking, it will be useful to turn to Brandom (1998) as his account of persons as 'concept-mongers' (1998:xi, 8, 172) relies upon rules and interpersonal action. As such, it stands as good ground from which we might make progress.

[2] This sort of thinking is explored in Nanay (2012)

Perspective as a Place Within Reasoning

The account coming from Putnam has it that reference is bounded by linguistic possibility. Language, though, is public and is a rule-centred activity. If intentionality isn't to be thought of as eclipsing consciousness in general, then more needs to be said about context relevance. What will emerge is an account of how self-consciousness and communication operate by navigating a 'space of reasons'.[3]

Brandom's (1998) account of communication centres upon the idea that through scrutinising inferences made in linguistic communication *via* a kind of 'scorekeeping mechanism' understanding can be achieved and monitored among a group of interlocutors. By keeping track on the discursive commitments and entitlements of ourselves and our conversational partners, we can come to an understanding of one another's perspectives. For instance, if I suggest to an interlocutor that Mary is in the garden, I am committed to the further claim that Mary is not in the ocean. Moreover, I feel entitled to pronounce on her whereabouts owing to, say, having seen her there. So in my claim about Mary's location, I exhibit something of my perspective in being correctly informed and tied to certain information and consequences.

To put it more generally, interlocutors A and B communicate when a claim p undertaken by A becomes available to B in her inferential system. B understands A's claim if B attributes the right commitment to A as a result of A's utterance. A necessary condition for B's understanding of A's utterance is for B to know the consequences of endorsing the claim herself, i.e. B must be able to assess the inferential significance of p relative to her commitment set. Communication requires that B must be able to select a sentence that would have the same or closely comparable inferential significance relative to her commitment set as A's utterance has relative to his.[4]

Reasoning about actual communicative practices provides us with a critical means of understanding one another. This is based in a kind of reconstruction of communication as a set of inferential practices. We can understand an interlocutor's perspective provide the means to reconstruct conceptual content: conceptual content is identified with inferential role. (ibid:619) This materiality of the inferential constellation in play is important as, unlike standard logical inferences, material inference utilises the content of the concept invoked in a predicate. For example, if I am to claim that Belfast is south-east of Derry, I am committed to the sentence 'The Maiden City is north-west of the Titanic's birthplace'. Such an inference uses the conceptual content of the concepts at play.

So the inferential constellation in play is related *via* language to rich knowledge that could include logical, physical, linguistic, practical laws and self-knowledge. This last factor is important. It is the 'can I ϕ?' of 'have I got it in me to ϕ?' where 'ϕ' is some action. Overcoming character flaws, supererogatory actions, self-effacing behaviour etc. are relevant in assessing one's ability to ϕ. These factors, indeed, can effectively trump others in practice, i.e. excessive humility may prevent a logically and physically action from being carried out. This highlights an essential characteristic of self-consciousness as an interesting case of consciousness more generally. It is worth dwelling a little

[3] This phrase comes from Wilfrid Sellars (1997)

[4] The clarity of this summary is owed to Kevin Scharp (2003)

longer on this notion of 'Can I ϕ?' in order to nail down the pragmatic aspects of the discussion at hand.

In perceiving any object as having some quality (x as Q) it is always already implied that the recognition of the possibilities for Q-ing are present in x. This means that we employ beliefs, desires and values in order to ground hypothetical modal statements of the form “Possibly If x then Q”. This is like saying to oneself “The ball is catchable.” It means that there are reasons to believe it can be caught (e.g. it’s not moving too fast, we aren’t playing a game in which handling the ball is prohibited, etc.) Perceiving Q-ability is thus related to belief, desire, value and experience via judgement – the judgement that is equal to the perception is an association between x, one’s own knowledge, and possible outcomes based in their conjunction.

Representing x as Q-able is not a matter of picturing, but a matter of associating x with a sphere of reasoning. Perceiving x as Q-able is related to reasons – it has to be as Q-ing x will be an action ϕ and so must be differentiated from mere movements or reflexes by issuing from a reason base. The reasons in the case of Q-ability are themselves the contents of predicates construed as material inferences in association with the modes of knowledge just expressed (logical, physical, technical, practical and self).

This doesn’t have to be a conscious representation of x as Q-able: the other way around – x can be represented as Q-able consciously in virtue of its being judged as located in a perception of x, one’s own knowledge, and possible outcomes based in their conjunction. Conscious decisions about x are made on this basis, not as the foundation of this basis. The judgement is the perception and it structures possibilities of ϕ-ing for the agent in advance.

This mirrors a broadly empiricist intuition that objects both precede and constitute perceptual experiences. What it goes beyond, however, is the notion that consciousness is exhausted by intentional thought. It does this by identifying the connections between consciousness and practical action as a nexus of judgements based in points of view. So the question now is; *how does this identification of connections proceed?* The brief answer to be proposed is: *via interpretation*. Indeed, it will transpire that interpretation and consciousness are linked in a fundamental way.

Interpreting Reasons

It has thus far been maintained that consciousness is bound up with the possibilities of interpreting a scene and discerning reasons in communication in some sense. Self-consciousness appears to be an intrinsically relevant feature of scenarios in which conscious beings are present. Putnam showed that there was no “God’s eye view”, and that language was a limiting factor in describing experiences. By extension, where there is no Archimedean viewpoint, perspective must be taken seriously in the characterisation of any given scene. This is accounted for in Brandom owing to the nature of the communicative endeavour. Communication, in this context, is concerned with what may be said and concluded are what may be relied upon as reasons are determined by the commitments and entitlements I have, as given by the meaningful utterances I make. In terms of a pragmatic theory of linguistic communication, this communicative model is supposed to help capture the real proprieties that are embedded in actual language use among speakers, “…what

moves are appropriate given a certain score, and what difference those moves make to that score". (Brandom 1998:180-186)

The point here is that *via* interpretation, answers can be gained to the question from above: what does a conscious being do? In being based in an interpretation, rather than a computable reduction to a pre-given language, these answers are based in the evaluation of perspectives. Such perspectives are the point of reference for reasoned actions, typified by communication. To return to an ongoing example, understanding a fall into a lake as a missed catch means constructing the perspective of the catcher-in-the-lake. This means construing that catcher's predicament as bound up with the confidence that the ball is catchable, hence with an articulable set of material commitments and entitlements. For instance, that no rules of a game being played precluded the entitlement to catch the ball; that catching the ball would lead to having the ball and this state is acceptable.

This interpreting of reasons and the role of perspective are important differences between the non-conscious and the conscious: in being practically construed in terms of the evaluation of practical actions in contexts, it sidesteps mysterianism. The emergence of consciousness is seen in the practice, not in the gaining of a peculiar quality. What remains, however, is the tension between first-person reports of actions and third person evaluations of action. The stakes here are the scopes of 'intentionality' and 'consciousness'.

The Locus of Reasons and Intentions

The idea that intention must figure in accounting for communicative meaning as it is speakers' intentions that determine what interpretation of an ambiguous sentence is meant to be taken up by an audience. However, upon looking at H. P. Grice's account through Richard Heck's analysis, reasons can be seen to inhabit communicatively used language itself, and so one could see reasons for understanding one's interlocutors in their speech actions themselves without necessary recourse to divining mysterious intentions. This Heckian modification of Grice urges the interpretive account of communicative understanding. Interpretation is a key part of the story of communicative meaning. Such an account results in *ad hoc*, context sensitive theories being constructed for one's interlocutors. Thus ambiguity is ubiquitous in communication in the sense that the the fixity of meaning as conceived along Platonic or Fregean lines is replaced with the plasticity of ongoing interpretive encounters. That communicative understanding is ubiquitous also urges an understanding of conscious beings as *essentially interpretive beings*.[5]

The kind of phenomena for which Gricean (1991) analysis seems particularly appropriate are those where one can mean more, or other, than what one literally says. One famous example is that of a professor's reference letter for a student. We are asked to suppose the professor writes of the student something like: "Jones is punctual and has neat handwriting."

[5] Recall that language is a species of action in general and so one needn't be linguistic to be an actor. Animals etc. can act. For the purposes of this argument, communicative action is the focus owing to its richness in exhibiting and expressing reasoning. Moreover action other than communicative action can, for a linguistic actor, be explained in language.

In writing such a sentence as an academic reference, the professor clearly gives his opinion of the student's unremarkable academic abilities but doesn't actually say anything about them. This unspoken but clear meaning is an 'implicature'. On an account of linguistic understanding that relies purely upon syntax and word meanings, a contents-and-connectives view, such things are hard or impossible to account for. On such an account the professor has simply praised the student's time-keeping and penmanship. As capable speakers we know there is more going on than just this. More is being communicated than is said but this something more needs accounted for.

Grice assumes that there is a cooperative principle underlying communicative practice (1991:22-40) This principle characterises the communicative exchange as a cooperative endeavour among interlocutors with a loosely defined purpose of sharing information. This assumption of a general loosely defined purpose to communication serves to set apart communication from random mumblings among groups of people. It also characterises it as a rational activity. Richard Heck regards this as the defining feature of Grice's project: "The core idea is thus that speech is a rational activity: everything else Grice says is, in effect, by way of elaborating or developing this core idea." (2006:25)

On the assumption that communication is a rational endeavour, furthermore, such phenomena as the professor's letter can be explained. Given broad expectations regarding quality, quantity, relevance and manner within a talk-exchange, to use Grice's terminology, utterances can convey more or other than what they literally say either by fulfilling or subverting those expectations. For instance, the expectations surrounding the professor's reference are not fulfilled which raises an obvious 'why?' for the reader of the letter, i.e. why, given all the normal expectations surrounding an academic reference letter, would a reasonable person fail to meet them? For Grice the answer is revealed through his obvious omissions what he really has on his mind about the student and the capable interlocutor picks this up.

Heck departs from Grice's account of implicatures and suggests his own treatment of linguistic understanding that is reliant upon a more basic notion than Grice's. The difference between Grice and Heck is in the emphasis each puts upon communicative intentions. For Grice, communicative intentions are ultimately the source of speakers' meanings, hence determine communicated meaning. Grice's account has it that a speaker communicates something by having a complex of intentions recognised by an audience that conveys the speaker's meaning, though this meaning may be very different from what the words in order apparently mean. But however one fleshes out the story behind the professor's reasons for not fulfilling expectations, they all share a common starting point: one cannot even raise the question as to why he has failed to fulfil expectations unless one assumes the professor to have been trying to do something in his writing what he did. That is, unless his so doing was considered as a doing, one of his volition and intentional under propositional descriptions no prospect of analysis in terms of meaning would arise. The writing of the letter must be apt to be thought of as an act of saying that p, and so, as an action it must be considered to be based on reasons.

Heck's point against Grice is that implicatures can be made without the specific communicative intentions Grice supposes to be necessary. Implicatures can be made adventitiously, as it were, and be quite independent of the general purpose of a particular talk-exchange or a particular meaning of an utterance. The point Heck argues for is that there is a more basic notion underlying accounts of

linguistic understanding than that of speakers' communicative intentions, namely the notion of the rationality of speech. His idea is that the reality of communication among speakers is a phenomenon like many others in that we rationalise the speech actions of others, which amounts to discerning why they act as they do; we interpret one another as acting for reasons, and in communication this is no different. Communicative intentions of the sort Grice relies upon are a real part of communication but, following Heck, they can be effective on the basis of the more fundamental reasonableness of linguistic communication itself, i.e. one can form communicative intentions and mean something on that basis, but one has one's communicative intentions recognised by relying upon the reasonableness of communicative practices.

Heck's claim is that the real phenomenon of meaning what one does not literally say is a special case of a phenomenon for which the propositional rationality of speech is chiefly responsible;

"The basic notion here… is a weak notion of implicature that does not require one to have any communicative intentions regarding what proposition is implicated: these propositions are ones the audience can conclude the speaker believes on the basis of an inference to the best explanation concerning her specific act of saying what she did; it makes no sense for me to have said that p specifically, in this context, unless I believe that q; my saying that p therefore implicates that q, in this weak sense. Meaning something one does not say is a less fundamental notion: meaning, in this sense – and so implicature in Grice's sense – is implicating something, in my weak sense, plus having the appropriate communicative intentions." (2006:28)

Communication, on Heck's account, proceeds upon the basis of a general cooperative practice that presumes interlocutors to be engaged in a mutual and rational linguistic endeavour. Heck emphasises the point that in understanding someone it is difficult to account for understanding them as meaning that p in uttering as they do without central reference to the idea of them saying that p, i.e. without reference to the fact that one's interlocutor is *doing* something in uttering. Any instance of communicative language use must be thought of as intentional under at least a propositional description, i.e. as an act of saying that p, of deploying sense-bearing sentences. Thus, language use in general can't be thought of without reference to language users' cognitive contents, and can't be detached from the actions of a rational agent without thereby rendering it unintelligible.

"If speaking is acting, one's saying what one does is as much a function of one's various beliefs and desires as anything else that one does. Others will therefore frequently be able to draw conclusions about what one believes (or does not believe), or wants (or does not want), from what one says (or does not say), in much the same way, and for much the same reason, that they are able to make such discoveries by considering other things one does (or fails to do)." (2006:29)

Heck goes on to characterise humans in general as self-consciously interpretive beings and suggests that the process outlined here proceeds owing to this fact. We suppose others to act for reasons just as we act for reasons, and so in the speech of others we discern reasons (beliefs and desires inter alia) for their speech-actions (or omissions). What this looks like motivating is a model of communicative meaning in which what counts is *mutual recognition* between speaker and audience of *deliberate communicative acts* by means of taking part in a *generally rational practice* of interpersonal speech.

Communicative meaning isn't an expression of something psychological by means of a linguistic instrument. Grice's account suggested that understanding communicated meanings amounted to divining complex intentions in our interlocutors. Heck gives the means to go beyond this, with his account, to account for understanding communication in terms of the language used in communication owing to its rational nature, i.e. we apprehend an interlocutor's reasons, present in their utterances qua speech-actions. In fact, intention too can be accounted for in this way.

The interpretation of action in a communicative context is taken as a mutual endeavour among interlocutors. Communicative action is thus a space of reasons in which one locates oneself and one's interlocutors as perspectives in a scene. Saying something is doing something, in the sense that one has expectations about the intentions of one's interlocutors to make a difference with their verbal interventions. But the mechanism that runs the communicative exchange is an interpretive one and is aimed at constructing the perspective of the other *via* getting a handle on the reasons they can have for the utterances they make.

Conclusion

One can, and probably usually does have intentions regarding the beliefs and actions of one's interlocutors, but these intentions are discernible within the language as practice. What an interlocutor may or may not do with an utterance seems up to them; they could perfectly well understand an utterance such as 'Could you close the door?' as a request and not an enquiry, hence as you wanting them to close a door, but simply refuse. The audience can know the conditions of your speech act's performance, i.e. recognise what it is you're doing in performing it but decide not to react as you intend. In this refusal, your meaning is not changed. Understanding, not elicited response seems centrally important.

On analysing linguistic communicative practice it seems that matters of meaning are much more fluid and context sensitive than might be thought. Communicating isn't a simple matter of transmitting and receiving clear, unambiguous messages. Stated extremely, each communicative encounter is in principle unique. However, given the ease with which communicative practices yield mutual intelligibility and understanding, one common factor must be the role of communicator *qua* interpretive being. So it seems that through an examination of familiar practices of communication we yield an unfamiliar picture of those practices, one seemingly full of potential chaos. Nonetheless, that picture can be understood in such a way as to have interesting implications for human self-understanding.

Bruner's fear was that 'thinkable is like computable' had morphed *via* a reduction within psychological thinking into 'computable equals thinkable.' This had led to an unfortunate identification between computation and consciousness. What was lost in this reduction was the sense in which conscious beings are creators and manipulators of meaning rather than processors of information.

Meaning-construction and information processing rely upon different concepts. The latter requires a strong sense in which neutral deductions and inferences are carried out against a background of uncontroversial assumptions. This is where computation comes in. The former is a less deterministic affair. In positing it as such, however, the risk is that we prompt flight into fancy. Putnam assured us

that interpretation was key and linked closely to language. There are no meaning-neutral assumptions that can be made such that a reduction to a fundamental language of some sort is possible. In a way, the limits of possibility are the limits of language, in Putnam's account. Brandom provided a means through which to comprehend the role of perspective in this, how concepts as rules could figure in a public activity that mediates meaning among a group of interlocutors.

Interpretation offers a general 'engine' as a means through which mutual understanding is made possible: the role of action based on reasons comes to the fore where meaningfulness must be ascribed to others (and oneself). Through Grice and Heck it was determined that reasons needn't be considered to be mysterious, as the public activity of language itself houses reasons. In fact, following Heck, language was also seen to be a repository for intentions. This means that in interpretation we can ascribe reasons and intentions to one another such that we can come to a view of one another's self-conscious perspective. This is essential given the importance placed upon 'meaning construction' for conscious beings. Using these resources we can without mysterianism account for how someone's perspective, such as their trying to catch a ball is an intrinsic part of the scene.

The emergence of consciousness requires a space of reasons that structures perspectives on action. These perspectives themselves are linked to actions *via* their communicability. We can understand systems, physical, intentional or otherwise construed, as a function of our ability to interpret them. We can interpret them according to our available schemes of description, evaluation, analysis etc., our language. Where we have a scene comprised solely of objects, prior interests or partial interests can specify that scene to a satisfactory degree. Where we have conscious beings, however, part of the scene involves their perspective on that very scene. 'Their perspective' is a group of reasons that explain action in that scene. In order to specify this to any satisfactory degree, we must look for these reasons, and do so in communication. Thus we see that consciousness, perspective and community each bleed into one another. Each has relevance to how objects and conscious beings differ, in terms of how self-conscious perspective makes a scene irreducible to a neutral description. Accounting for such perspectives requires essential reference to reasons and intentions, and so to the communicative potential of a public.

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